The Ignorant Public

By Courtesy of The New Republic.

THE interests of the public are paramount. That is the insistent refrain of editorial comment on labor disputes. As a declaration of fundamental principle, it is incontrovertibly sound. The public—100 per cent of the population—must be fed, housed, clothed, transported. For this government exists. The paralysis of production or distribution, the interruption of the free flow of the necessaries of life, signalizes the paralysis of government itself.

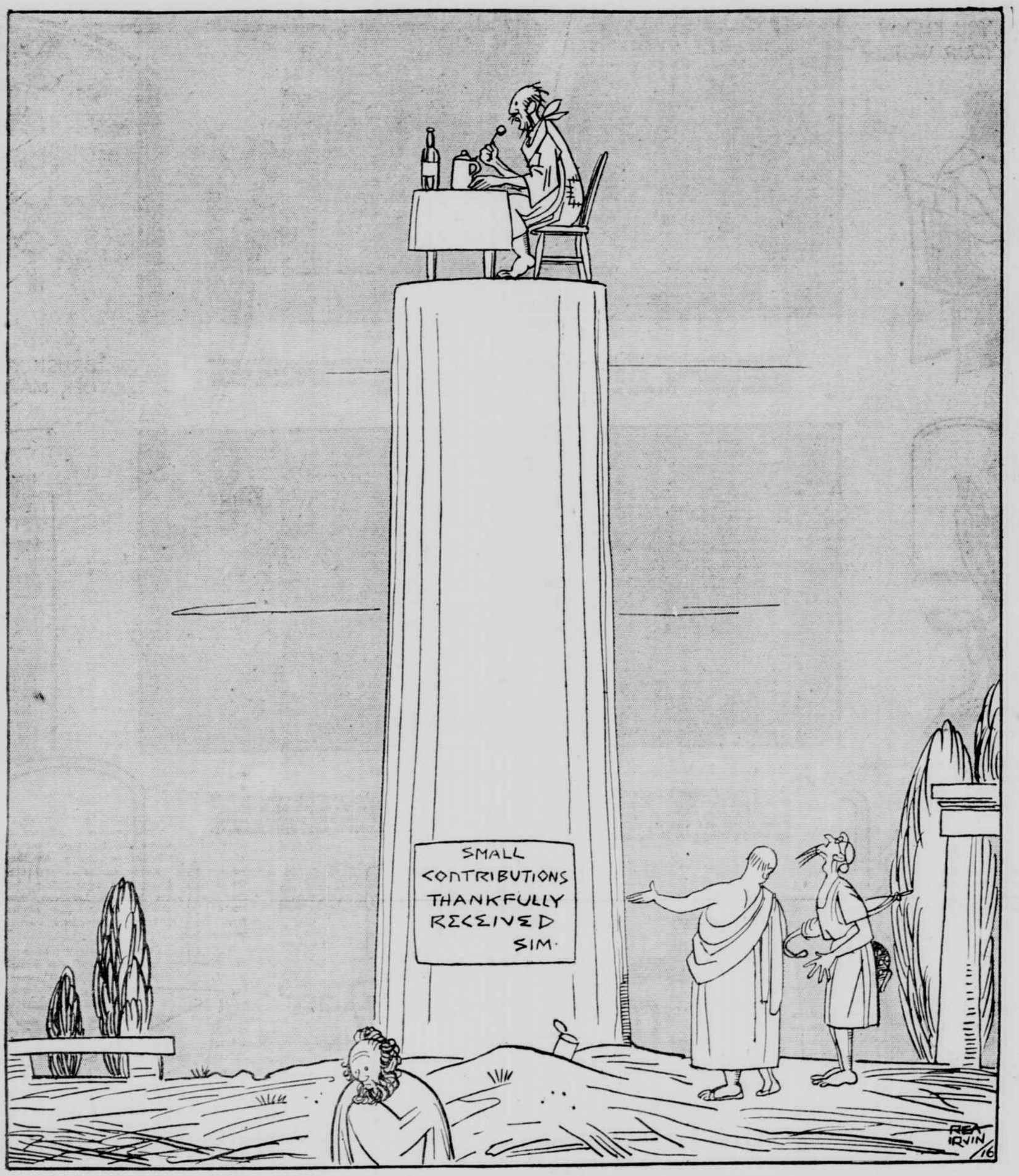
But if the public is to make effective its claim to paramount consideration, it must be prepared to enter the field of industrial controversy, not on the sole ground of its own physical comfort, but as the authoritative arbiter of social justice and productive efficiency. All business is coming to be clothed with a "public interest" and is properly subject to public control; but it is unreasonable to expect business men to give an efficient account of their stewardship if, like the proverbial housemaid, they are to be subjected to capricious interference by a public devoid of a rational policy toward business. Neither is it reasonable to expect wage-workers to conduct themselves with punctilious regard for the public convenience so long as the public remains indifferent to the conditions under which they work and to such elementary questions as whether the rewards of labor are the wages of hunger, disease and squalor, or the wages of economic security and an opportunity to share the amenities of life.

Hitherto, of the three parties in interest, the public has been the most derelict in discharging its responsibility in the matter of industrial disputes. Every explosion of the smouldering industrial unrest finds the party of the third part unprepared, ignorant of the questions at issue, dazed, petulant, mystified. The coal miners go on strike. Immediately the public has anticipatory visions of itself huddled in improvised wrappings, goose-fleshed in the winter sun. Like the helpless bystander at a brawl, it cries hysterically to both sides to stop mussing things up. The instant the fracas is over, the public complacently returns to the warmth of its accustomed shelter. But why did the men strike? What wages had they been receiving? Under what conditions did they work? Had the owners been operating the mines with due regard to the public interest, or merely as means of personal aggrandizement? And what of the new agreement? Does it provide a decent standard of living for the workers and proper safeguards for the financial strength of the property? Is it a rational basis for peace and progressive adjustment, or merely a patched-up truce, which both sides will scheme to evade at the strategically expedient moment? Such questions the public neither asks nor seeks to answer, whether with respect to the miners, the textile workers, the garment makers or any other industrial group. With the passing of the immediate fear of inconvenience, the public goes into intellectual hibernation.

Clearly such an attitude is incompatible with the claim to paramount consideration; it is flaccid, sybaritic, irresponsible. Instead of commanding the respect due to competent authority, it breeds demoralization and contempt. And to-day the public is totally unequipped with the knowledge essential to any effective assertion of its claim. Such instruments as we have created for the regularization of business—the Interstate Commerce Commission, the various state public service commissions and the like—have concentrated their attention upon questions of capitalization and rates. The human side of industry has had little or no systematic consideration. There has, to be sure, been a certain stirring of the public conscience in behalf of exploited women and children and the insurance of workers against industrial injuries. But these measures deal with the fringes of the industrial problem; they do not pretend to go to its core. Such facts as we have concerning the conditions of employment are principally wage statistics, and these are of the most general character. They are sufficient, however, to furnish an unequivocal answer to the harassed question as to the cause of "industrial unrest"; and they furnish, also, a clear index to the first step which the public must take if it is to become an authentic participant in the adjustment and prevention of industrial disputes.

Whatever one may think as to the wisdom of the recent federal legislation affecting the railroads, it is obvious that it was based upon considerations of expediency and abstract justice, rather than upon knowledge of the wages and working conditions of the millions of railroad workers. The recent traction muddle in New York City was quite as obviously due to the absence of similar information, so that here, too, the authorities were guided by legalistic and superficial considerations, while the inconvenienced public fearfully groped in the dark. The traction companies, like the cloak and suit manufacturers last summer, cavalierly disregarded the public's plea for arbitration, because the public approached the situation without any foundation in law or knowledge of the issues upon which to rest an authoritative demand for arbitration. A comprehensive audit of our railroads and of all industries entering into interstate commerce should be immediately undertaken by the national government, and a similar audit at the hands of the local authorities is imperative with respect to local public utilities. Until this work has been done, the public will continue to be as helpless in the presence of industrial disputes as the hen that hatched ducklings; and the two sides in controversy will continue to respect the convenience of the public to precisely the extent they deem expedient.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY---*By Rea Irvin*



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ARE WOMEN PEOPLE?

By Alice Duer Miller

SPEAKING the other day at a meeting of naturalized citizens, the President said: "Only by conscience and loyalty can you become true citizens."

Alas, if that were all required to make a true citizen women would not complain.

Unfortunately in most states it requires a constitutional amendment.

We have found something we should have thought impossible; namely, a new reason for wanting to be a voter.

It rests the mind.

To the onlooker it seems as if both candidates had virtues and both parties defects—especially the latter.

But a voter as soon as he makes up his mind how he is going to vote ceases to listen to the reasons of the other side.

And that is so peaceful.

VOTE-THOUGHTS FROM THE DISFRANCHISED

(Not by Robert Browning)

Oh, to be a voter,
Now election's here,
For whoever is a voter
Thinks, and seems to be sincere,
That his party's pledge and his candidate
Is something unutterably pure and great,
While the other party just makes a row,
For voters—now.

"The New York Times" seems to have come to the conclusion that Western men are more chivalrous than those of the East. In speaking of a recent effort on the part of voteless Eastern women to make their indirect influence effective "The Times" says: "Again and again in the very part of the country where women are supposed to be most valued and most tenderly respected they have suffered everything except physical assault."

The part of the country so described is one of those where women are classed with felons, bribers, criminals and idiots.

Overheard in a Club Barber Shop

"I see by the papers that the girls are taking all the prizes in the public schools."

"Well, you know why that is, don't you?"

"Because girls are cleverer than boys?"

"No, because they are more precocious. Their minds mature early, like monkeys'."

"Ah, I understand. So that the fact that they take the prizes is really just a fresh proof of their mental inferiority?"

"Exactly."

(A comfortable pause.)

"But how about high-schools? I see the girls take a higher stand in high-school, too."

"Well, you know why that is, don't you?"

"No, why is it?"

"Vanity. Girls at that age are so vain that they think of nothing but excelling."

"Ah, I understand. So that, as a matter of fact, is just another proof of their intellectual inferiority?"

"Exactly."

(Another comfortable pause.)

"Yes, but how about the colleges? I see by the papers that they are getting too many academic honors and Phi Beta Kappa keys."

"Yes, but thank goodness they are going to be excluded from that."

"Why are they being excluded?"

"Why, my dear fellow, you don't want the highest intellectual honors to go to the mentally inferior sex, do you?"

"No, of course not."

(A comfortable silence.)

VOWS

[The Episcopal Convention is in favor of retaining the word "obey" in the marriage service.]

Once upon a time a bride
By the name of Florence May
Could not, would not bend her pride
To pronounce the word "obey";
Yet when married, as of old,
Did whatever she was told.

And another girl named Anne,
Thought the word "obey" was sweet.
She could only love a man
Trampled underneath his feet.
Liked to do as she was bid,
So she said—but never did.

Their two husbands, Will and Dave,
Did not question, fuss or palter,
All their worldly goods they gave,
Freely, gladly, at the altar.
Gladly, for they never meant
To give up a single cent.

The Unshaken Hand

PHILEMON'S greatest ambition was to shake hands with the President of the United States. Philemon was a young man of simple tastes who lived in a country town a long way from everywhere, and particularly from Washington, D. C.

He had read of the White House and how the Chief Executive of the American people was always willing to meet and greet his constituents when they came to pay their respects, and it struck Philemon as a fine, democratic thing for a President to do. Oftentimes Philemon would hold out his right hand, hard and calloused from work on the farm, and wonder whether at some time in the rosy future it would move up and down in the Washington atmosphere close coupled with that of a President's. At such times Philemon's heart would sink within him because Tankport, his home town, and Washington, D. C., were separated by about 1,500 miles of railroad track.

His desire to shake hands with a real President stuck by him through the years, and naturally, when an old uncle died and left him a stocking full of coins dating back into the last century, Philemon's first thought was of Washington. He bought him a new suit of clothes at the Bee Hive on Main Street, and to the accompaniment of envious adieus left Tankport one evening as a passenger on the 5:22.

"At last," sighed Philemon, "my wish is to be realized. I am on my way to shake hands with the President of the United States."

Philemon's ticket entitled him to a stop-over of almost forty-eight hours at the nation's capital, time enough to see the Congressional Library, Congress, the Smithsonian Institution and other Washington wonders, but the prospect of seeing these did not fluster him a bit. He had but one ambition: the ambition of his childhood. He wished only to walk into the White House grounds and up the steps and into the presence of him whom the Indians called the Great Father. Then, as the Chief Executive of ninety millions of people shook his—Philemon's—humble hand Philemon would inwardly swell with pride as he thought of what he would have to tell his children's children. As he approached the goal of his dreams he trembled with anticipation, and when the train came to a final halt in the station with the vaulted roof Philemon walked out into Washington as into a rosy mist.

It was early in the morning, but Philemon couldn't wait. He knew, he had read, that the best time to see a President was on a public reception day, and he wasn't sure whether this was such a day or not, but he thought perhaps that, seeing his eagerness, the White House attendants would pass him in, anyway. It would take but a minute of the President's time to shake hands with him. And what a glorious minute that would be!

Philemon dusted off his shoes with a pocket handkerchief, and walked into the White House grounds. He walked as one in a blissful, ecstatic dream, a dream that would shortly turn out to be true. He hesitated, with a stranger's hesitation, at the public entrance to the Executive Mansion, and a courteous attendant came toward him with an inquiring air.

"I should like to—to shake hands with the President," said Philemon, in rather a faint voice. "May I see him?"

The White House attendant smiled indulgently.

"I am afraid it would be difficult to arrange it," he remarked, pleasantly. "The President isn't in Washington, just now. You know he is on a speaking tour of the Middle West. Have you come far to see him?"

Philemon's heart became a stone.

"From Tankport, Illitucky," he replied in hollow tones; "fifteen hundred miles."

"From Tankport?" queried the attendant. "Why, what a coincidence! The President's train stopped there yesterday, and he made a ten-minute speech. The stop is mentioned in this morning's paper."

With leaden feet Philemon left the White House grounds and bought him a paper at the first newsstand he saw. Sure enough, there it was; under an Illitucky date line:

"During the day the President made brief speeches to the people of North Middlebury, Cow Plains, Hoopleville, Dingle and Tankport. He spoke in every instance from the back platform of the train, and good humoredly shook the hands of the country folk who crowded around him."

Philemon didn't read any more. He spent the day in the Congressional Library, meditating upon the advisability of leaping from the topmost gallery of the rotunda down to the main floor, some distance below; and in the evening he took a train, with a sleeper attached, which was headed toward Tankport. Incidentally, he took a sleeping powder. He needed it.

Arriving at Tankport, Philemon confirmed his worst suspicions. All of his friends, the younger set of Tankport, had shaken hands with the President of the United States, amid the blare of the Tankport Silver Cornet Band, when the President's train stopped there for fifteen minutes on the way to Chicago. What was worse, some of the more active of the boys had shaken hands with him twice, sticking their flippers up from the frantic mob around the observation car. Worse still, and worst of all, it hadn't cost them a cent.

Philemon's motto now is: "Everything comes to him who waits." And whenever he feels like shaking hands with a President of the United States Philemon goes out in the stable yard and works the pump.